CHAPTER FOUR

Foregrounding Acculturation Strategies

In Writers from

Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

For a man who no longer has a homeland, Writing becomes a place to live.

– Theodor Adorno
Contemporary writers strive to outline the boundaries and definitions of hyphenated communities and immigrants, who are in the process of metamorphosing and evolving into hybrid identities. The novels focus primarily on life in the hostland, the lure of the homeland and the acculturation strategies, the family and the individuals adopt to survive. The second generation celebrate a hybrid lifestyle and adapt to its cool new flavor, its syncretic art and cultural products, a lifestyle which is now part of the British cultural scene. British Asian women are split between an emotional allegiance to the homeland but feel more connected to the mainstream hostland, because of a greater independence in the lifestyle. Nostalgia and yearning for the homeland located in the earlier chapter is also evident with feelings of alienation, rootlessness at the discordant, disturbing postmodern scenario. Identities of Brit Asians in the eighties were in a state of flux and a variety of adaptation strategies were adopted as there was no single unified policy which all could espouse. The migrant today swings between a strong sense of disconnect with his fluid identity reaffirming what Stuart Hall defines, “no fixed, permanent or essential identity.” The second generation immigrants have adapted better as their distinct formative aspects are interwoven into the British social and cultural fabric. Issues of assimilation, possible integration, availability of a supportive family and community life, racism, are deliberated along with other issues of immigrant life. The existence of innate values in spite of spatial and temporal distances from the actual homeland is also analysed.
Home and homeland – Defining home and its location is related not only to the displaced identity of the self, the NRSA and as an extension the family, but also to the identity of the immigrant community. It is a ‘construct’ which travels across borders and boundaries raising questions of race, nation, nationality, the porosity of borders and citizenship.

Home involves a radical dislocation of spatio-temporal, ideological and linguistic coordinates and has different connotations for diasporic people from India and a different interpretation here. Home is a ‘personal construct’ while homeland is a ‘collective construct’ of an entire group of displaced immigrants. In both there is an attempt at re-territorialization – an act of reimagining or recreating home in a foreign land. Monica Ali came to the UK at an early age – as she herself puts it in an interview:

I cannot draw any clear parallels with my family history. But I can feel the reverberations. . . How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway, is a good place from which to observe.¹

Recreating the original home in the hostland is an expected outcome by all immigrants – it is their little haven. It is not only a nostalgia driven exercise but an
anchor in the alien land, a place of one’s own. Nazneen in *Brick Lane* brings about a single change in the house which she cannot call her own, a shelf to keep the Quran. Besides this, she does not make any alteration submitting to Chanu, her husband for everything as she dusts, cleans, swabs – always keeping his things in order. It is in the end as she is learning to figure out her own self, finally independent that she makes subtle changes like planting winter pansies in the window sill. Pearl in *The Sandglass* makes no changes in her home in England preferring to put all her creative energies into her knitting. Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Gunaratne’s *The Match* also show no such changes in the home interiors by the characters, no staking out of territory. Ambiguities about his own home assail Gunaratne as he claims, ‘I don’t know where my home is’. This is probably why both his novels here are peopled by wanderers and its universal concerns are connected to the immigrant’s fractured relationship with the past and the multiplicity of homes. Kureishi’s formulation of home depends on one’s domestic environment and one’s sense of national belonging. Karim notices the changes in the decor brought about by his mother after his father leaves them – it is as if his absence finally makes the house, her own. However, having assimilated to a great extent as he considers himself an Englishman almost, he does not need to put forth any markers to symbolise his difference. Kureishi destabilises home at an emotional level as a site of physical and psychic violence and uses it repeatedly in the novels as the site of marital and family breakdowns. He records the ongoing difficulties faced by the first generation by showing the impermanence of home through the realities of
migration. Immigrant writing proves that nationhood is always evolving. The answer to rootlessness, a perennial problem associated with dislocation lies within – it is in the immigrants understanding of his position in the society.

Life in Britain, reinscribed through both Asian and British eyes in The Buddha of Suburbia presents the postmodern scenario of the seventies with an atmosphere of tension and alienation, more so for the immigrant who attempted to make his presence felt in a world unclear with the haze of drugs, alcohol, sex and spiritualism. In the cloistered confines of the suburb everything was familiar and unappealing, the familiarity makes Karim quote in the first paragraph itself, “…because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy in our family.” (Kureishi, 1). He looks for escape from the ‘place’ where he had lived for seventeen long years, behind closed doors. His escape is thwarted by the love he has for his Mum, the desire he has within that his parents stay together as he feels strongly that his father is unfair with her. In spite of realizing that his own possibilities for an exciting life was with his father’s new interest Eva, a contrast to the dull existence he had with his ever worried Mum yet, some part of him longs for permanence and an united family. Home, for him meant a sense of security, stability and the strength to create a new identity. This is why his father’s friends Anwar, Jeeta and Jamila continue to be his close family friends. It is because they address his instinctive desire for a home, a family. Karim helps them out when he can, as he stubbornly refuses to belong wholly to any of the homes he
is associated with. Home in diaspora writing is an unsettled category. Writers like Kureishi and Randhawa claims Susheila Nasta have:

opened up new spaces for the heterogeneity of the diaspora within Britain and have translated previously static notions of ‘home’ or ‘abroad’, ‘native’ or ‘immigrant’ into a series of differently conceived possibilities situated within the contested terrain of ‘Englishness’ itself. Home she further adds is no longer a ‘single place, but represents instead a series of locations, an imaginative ground fertile for new improvisations.’

Nazneen is a first generation immigrant who leaves Bangladesh for Britain at the tender age of nineteen and is married to Chanu who is forty. Issues of home, belonging and identity are central to her as she belongs to a close knit family. Her idea of home embodies with great sensitivity a discourse of locality, a sense of place which embraces networks of families and friends and signifies a specific space, both geographically and psychologically. Steadfastly she wishes daily for six months she could be back ‘home’ not this council flat with its, ‘pink dressing table with the curly – sided mirror and the monstrous black wardrobe which claimed half the room, the three rugs – red and orange, green and purple, brown and blue, the sofa and chairs which were the colour of dried cow dung with little sheaths of plastic to protect them from Chanu’s hair oil, a low table with orange plastic legs, three wooden tables, a big table, a corner cupboard, a rack for newspapers, a trolley filled with files and books, two footstools, six dining chairs, a cupboard stuffed with pottery and china figures and plastic fruits, plates on the wall mixed with his certificates. Nazneen had to dust all these with the same
unfailing regularity as she had to snip dead things off her husband – the corns on his feet, his nails and hair. Monica Ali uses the cluttered room where Nazneen lives as a metaphor for her protagonist’s state of mind. It is a deliberate strategy which helps her to be psychologically detached in the overcrowded setup and from Chanu. As the flat becomes even more cluttered over the course of the text, she finds it easier to declutter her mind, detach herself, to focus and decide things for herself. It is a physical and mental strategy brought about after much heart wrenching. As a contrast to her home in Britain, Bangladesh brings back memories of space, openness and light, a deliberate authorial strategy to provide a contrast between the past and the present. She strategises to make her life a little more livable by planning imaginary meetings with her neighbor, the tattoo lady and reading the Holy Quran which calms her. Nazneen often takes refuge in religion by reciting ‘suras’ from the Quran. The return to Islam is neither a political nor a religious move but a symbol of reassurance and hope. Islam seems significant for her not because of its religious significance – it was a structure, a discipline, a psychological strategy that provided her with stability and comfort. C Vijayashree quotes:

Recreating icons of their own religion and rehearsing rituals therefore becomes a sort of defence mechanism in their lives. The past that they left behind is preserved in the form of an icon, a symbol, a ritual or a talisman.  

But her most important anchor when life became difficult was to revert to her homeland – Gouripur. Memory was an important psychological strategy as it
gave her wings, bore her to the past, brought it closer and made the present tolerable:

She drifted off to where she wanted to be, in Gouripur tracing letters in the dirt with a stick while Hasina danced around on her six-year-old feet. In Gouripur, in her dreams, she was always a girl and Hasina was always six. Amma scolded and cuddled, and smelled as sweet as the skin on the milk when it had been boiled all day with sugar. Abba sat on the choki, sang and clapped. He called out to them and took them on his lap, and sent them away with a rough kiss on the cheek. (Ali, 35)

Sunny in The Match had the same feeling, an intense longing for his homeland he could not put into words. The past in Colombo as he explains to Clara has disappeared, ‘That’s different. That world has gone. The past was very different. I couldn’t go back.’ (Gunesekera, 180). Seeing Colombo burning, recognizing the town of his childhood on TV he felt passionate about it:

These were not atrocities committed in a country of some other world. This was a part of him destroying itself. There are no boundaries in our lives he thought. There are no borders except in our minds. (Gunesekara, The Match, 153)

This was an emotional strategy exploited by Gunesekera to bring out a longing for the homeland. It reveals the immigrant dilemma – the longing for the homeland mixed with confusion. He was aware, the Nazis had perverted the nature of man, there was barbarity in India during Partition, in Vietnam, in Cambodia. But this was an island he had known:
With people – victims and perpetrators – who looked just like him. An island where he and his mother and his father had been born. (Gunesekara, *The Match*, 154)

The contrast is deliberate, a strategy to intensify acculturation in the hostland which seemed far removed from the violence in the homeland. Appadurai’s theory of mediascape can be used to elaborate the role media plays in the immigrant’s life and how it attempts to bring the homeland – imaginary or otherwise closer. Mediascapes are ‘image centred, narrative based accounts of strips of reality’ and play a great role in the unleashing of emotion. Sunny watching the scenes of violence on television realises his father must have heard about what he was actually witnessing:

the ten thousand deaths and heaps of bodies that clogged the rivers in 1971 – there had been hardly any news or pictures. The true enormity of what had taken place was slow to emerge. Now in 1983 decapitations, bomb blasts, mutilations, were being flashed across the world. (Gunesekara, *The Match*, 154)

But back home he could see the scenes of physical violence. Gunesekera strategises here to intensify stronger emotions about the homeland and also enable the immigrant to establish his roots in the hostland. The scenes highlight the fragments from the past which add to already unsettled condition. This is what Rushdie states in *Imaginary Homelands* as the ‘fragments of memory’. Twice removed from Sri Lanka, years later Sunny understands it better though
he does not voluntarily return when his father was alive. The inexplicable feeling of home-sickness intensifies after his son was born, the desire to revisit his roots before it got too late.

Homeland stresses Vijay Mishra is also available in the diasporic world in the confines of one’s bedroom as the late postmodern world has also created hyper mobile communities capable of interacting through airplanes, telephone, e-mail, TV, the internet, video cassettes and so on. This homeland in the confines of the hostland stirs up a longing which is difficult to explain or control.

When Sunny came to London, to study engineering he had time, loads of it. The Londoners referred to Ceylon as a cup of tea – a view which disappointed him. To him it meant much more but he couldn’t articulate it. The thoughts he had in his mind of London from the pop lyrics, which he heard which included ideas of hippy debauchery and huggy togetherness were unfortunately not true as he discovered. He felt alienated – the combination of, ‘frost, fog, the enforced proximity of undesirable strangers, and the uncertainty whether he was doing what he wanted, made him more introspective than before. (Gunesekara, The Match, 81)

Recalling homelands and connecting it with their present homes from a diasporic space is not uncommon among immigrant writers. It is in fact a major strategy used by many diasporic writers to help their characters acculturate in the right
way. From the distance of the hostland, homelands are elevated to utopian heights. Often homelands are places where the immigrant has never visited, but can visualise through texts, descriptions, stories and yet, they are creations of the mind, very often a cleverly packaged product with carefully chosen and crafted patches. Edward Said notes that:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music is contrapuntal.⁵

Sara’s father in Meatless Days takes up a job as a London correspondent and the entire family move to England. In England however, away from the familiarity of his country and his people, he felt like a minority once more. So after a brief stay he moved back not wanting them to stay in a country that did not belong to them. England recalls Sara in spite of her mother’s connection was never home. The story explores cultural unbelonging and strategies of survival which were both physical and psychological brought about by memory.

Experimenting with the profession he wants to adopt Sunny buys a shop from Stan Ladek, an immigrant from Czechoslovakia who explains why he wanted to sell it and go back to his homeland:

I was born there. I would like to see again before I die. I’d like to hear my real name again, as it was.Stanislav . . . Why? I don’t know. Perhaps it is the foolishness of the old and lonely.’  
(Gunasekara, The Match, 171)
Unable to articulate why he wanted to visit Sri Lanka, Sunny tells Clara:

I’ve been thinking. I don’t know what it is like any more. So much must have changed in the last few years . . . and there’s roots and all that. (Gunesekara, The Match, 152) . Trying to explain to his young son about the sense of belonging he speaks aloud trying to find an answer for himself. ‘What ties a person to a place? He thought of his father finding a home in a fantasy, Makati. Almost a whole life spent somewhere else. His mother giving up her place on earth. Who has a claim on any place? (Gunesekara, The Match, 178)

There is a state of limbo in his life, indecisiveness, helplessness, angst at the realization but also an inability to move ahead – he wanted to do something but did not know what:

He only knew he wanted to do something soon. If nothing else, to see the place of his birth, the country he had lost sight of for more than a quarter of a century, and make it his again. Possibly produce some pictures that would show something more than ruined monuments and moral debasement. He wanted to do it before he got old, before he started forgetting everything, or not caring; before Hector, and even Aunty Lillie, vanished from the world. (Gunesekara, The Match, 193)

Sunny confirms in these traits the true qualities of a postmodern character, disoriented, dislocated and disturbed. Chip in The Sandglass attempts to piece together the debris of Pearl’s fragmented past in Sri Lanka as she recollects stories of her earlier phase in England – her adopted land. It is an exploration of the deceptions of memory combined with a subtle analysis of the process of
writing itself as she narrates the details of the Ducal’s Arcadia in Sri Lanka - suggesting a nostalgic yearning for an idealized Eden.

It is Chip, the omnipresent narrator, who articulates what it felt like to be an immigrant, in the hostland, London where he had come with an uncertain, unsure future – in search of a youthful dream:

. . . I felt a familiar inkling that I have learned to live with now: a sense of accelerating loss for what is behind us – the lost opportunities, the unregainable past – and fear for what lies ahead. (Gunesekara, *The Sandglass*, 220).

Pearl communicates openly with Chip, than her own children and sometimes asked for news of home. ‘She would only ask about the place, the politics, the economy’ (Gunesekara, *The Sandglass*, 40) careful not to show she wanted more, aware that now this was her homeland – she would never reveal the turmoil within. The only link between them was her son, Prins and their common homeland, Sri Lanka. Pearl felt more at home in the adopted land, ‘Daffodil country’ as she called it content with her memories, her television shows, her occasional Sri Lankan food, the waiting for spring and her knitting . She tried to make all this a special event to look forward to as there was nothing left to look behind in the actual homeland. And yet, all this did not make it her home. She had fled from Sri Lanka voluntarily after her husband’s death and never went back again remembering her homeland and trying to keep her family intact.
together but somehow she did not succeed. Pearl yearned for the sun though she did not talk about it. Used to the hot sun in tropical Sri Lanka, she often had the electric fire switched on, while the sun blazed outside – a physical strategy to adapt her dislocated self to a climate which did not suit her.

Gunesekera’s obsession with creating a ‘home’ in his fiction has been considered by critics as the desire by a ‘migrant’ writer to create yet another ‘imaginary homeland’. ‘Home’ is expressed by a mental geography in Gunesekera’s work through the representations of a physical landscape, the writing process itself becoming an unspoken characteristic of the literary ‘homes’ he creates. Melanie Murray comments that Gunesekera’s text indicates Bhabha’s “double relation” of migrancy as he cross-references locations – London and Sri Lanka – and moves between and present, but also exposes the tales as fractured memories. In recent times it may have become convenient for contemporary critics or literary historians to attempt to ‘place’ stories in their search for signs of cultural authenticity or racial signatures – yet the ‘best stories’ Gunesekera argues, do not necessarily belong anywhere, rather there are ‘invented’ and sometimes recognizable ‘places’ that exist in them. This is probably why his masterpieces Monkfish Moon, Reef, The Sandglass are locations where one can travel to as he says ‘conveniently without moving your feet.’ ‘Home’ for Chanu towards the end is his homeland. It is his personal sanctuary a place where he would get all answers. He feels,”….Back home we’ll really know what’s what.” (Ali, 388)
For Kureishi, ‘home’ refers to a temporary location and also questions factors concerning ‘return’, especially as his immigrant character, Anwar and Haroon have integrated and assimilated into the British system. They do not think of the homeland they have left behind. Haroon was comfortable in the metaphorical fringe of the hostland, with little real desire for return to the acknowledged, accepted centre, while Anwar conformed to the trajectory of being an Asian immigrant surviving in an Indian type store selling toilet rolls, sardine tins, sanitary pads and turnips. Eager to assimilate when they arrive in Britain to study, Haroon and Anwar, try hard to fit in, strategising to follow typically English ways. Anwar’s practice of Islam and Haroon’s suddenly developed passion for yoga, late in life shows their ever growing need to reestablish and re-assert their Indian identities. Haroon’s yoga and oriental discourses are a gimmick planned for his Western audience but is ironical since it is a deliberately marketable, exploitative strategy to promote himself. The two friends have strategised to acculturate, improve their lives and now spurred by no fresh commitments are content to live in the hostland. Remembering India, Anwar comments:

Why would I want to go there again? It’s filthy and hot and it’s a big pain – in – the – arse to get anything done. (Kureishi, 64).

They complain about difficult conditions of life in India, criticize what in their eyes now appears as a hellish Third World country, corroded by harsh poverty,
religious divisions and climatic adversities. The reasons for the acculturation in England were:

Things worked; it wasn’t hot; you didn’t see terrible things on the street you could do nothing about. He wasn’t proud of his past, but he wasn’t unproud of it either; it just existed there was no point in fetishizing it, as some liberals and Asian radicals liked to do. (Kureishi, 213).

After years of not being accepted by the Whites, disillusioned, they turn back ironically, mentally to the homeland. “We Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India” (Kureshi, 74). Their insistence on preserving and cherishing Asian traditions as they get older is a strategy to continue in the land they had got used to, returning only internally to their ‘imagined India’, which gave them a stronger sense of cultural belonging. India remains the chief psychological referent and Haroon confesses to feeling the pull of what Rushdie has termed (in a well-known phrase) the ‘imaginary homeland’. The halo around the imaginary land appears again and again as he grows older. With Anwar’s death the past resurfaces and he dies mumbling about, “Bombay, the beach, the boys in Cathedral school, and calling for his mother.” (Kureishi, 212).

Among all the characters it is Nazneen who misses her homeland the most. When pregnant she often felt ensnared – trapped inside her body, inside her room, inside the flat, inside the concrete slab of entombed humanity, as she
struggled to maintain a balance between the demand for conformity in public life and the urge to retain her individuality. Her only strategy was a reconnect with unsullied Gouripur:

For a couple of beats, she closed her eyes and smelled the jasmine that grew close to the well, heard the chickens scratching in the hot earth, felt the sunlight that warmed her cheeks and made dancing patterns on her eyelids. (Ali, 61)

What Nazneen remembers about home is the lush, fresh, green landscape of rural Bangladesh more so because it contrasts with the decay and decadence found in the Council flats. Missing her family, she tries to make the process of acculturation easier in the adopted land by reading and rereading her sister Hasina’s letters from Bangladesh. The letters helped her to adjust, to understand socio-eco-political conditions in Bangladesh and realize how lucky she was in her marriage. It was a record of Bangladesh – a social diary.

But the process of acculturation in Nazneen paid off. After years of longing for home she could finally identify why she did not want to return. Social, economic, physical and psychological ties which had established comfort in the host land were a reality and so was the idea of the postcolonial migrant returning, ‘home’. In spite of being the first generation the decision to stay back with her children is a conscious one. The passing of time, the attendant changes in attitudes and
expectations show the true extent of her acculturation. The return home is a myth because even if the immigrant returns he cannot sever the ties of comfort – physical, emotional, familial and social links to which he has adapted. The fact is reinforced by Nazneen’s reaction, years after acclimatizing to the system. When she thought of Gouripur she thought of inconvenience:

To live without a flushing toilet, to abandon her two sinks (kitchen and bathroom), to make a fire for the oven instead of turning a knob – would these be trades worth making? (Ali, 51)

Much later sitting closely with her husband she realizes these simple intimacies would not be possible back home. The change shows, the immigrant’s integration. The West has become a part of his internal system with corresponding changes in attitudes and expectations. When Sunny goes in search of an elusive ‘something’ he is not able to find it in the homeland like Chanu in Brick Lane. Sunny, stirred by his roots goes to Sri Lanka wanting to reclaim, control the past, freeze it, to pack it all in as reminders. Probably it was his way of strategising – making life a little more livable in the chosen country, resurrecting the ‘home’ in the hostland with fragments of what he had lost, affirming that the imagined land was not one he could go back to:

In the remaining few days in Colombo, Sunny went into manic overdrive. He rushed about collecting brass plates, oil lamps, batik prints, wooden toys, curry powder, books, postcards, anything that might help him recreate the richness of the place for Mikey, and also for Clara: to give them an idea of what he had seen. He hired
Piyasena to run him around and took loads of pictures – snapshots, pure and simple. Pictures of buildings, cars, birds. Kids playing cricket in alley-ways and wastelands, between tin cans and clothes lines on streets and on the beach. (Gunesekara, *The Match*, 231)

But on the last night of his trip he is a trifle disappointed. He tells Hector: “I didn't really find my world” he said. “I even went to Amma’s grave” (Gunesekara, *The Match*, 232). Likewise Chanu, returns to Bangladesh with great expectations but realizes that his imaginary homeland was a mere mental construct. He seals his conflict with a proverb – ‘You can’t step into the same river twice’. (Ali, 409)

Avtar Brah in Cartographies of Diaspora asks:

Where is a home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’.  

Having followed and assimilated her mother’s dictum, ‘What cannot be changed must be borne’ and realising that her life would be inconclusive if she does not take decisions, Nazneen finally, strategises emotionally to assume responsibility for her own end. It is life in the hostland that makes her take a decision to integrate. Hasina’s unending subjugation makes Nazneen determined not to be simply ‘left to her fate’, a condition so glorified by her mother. Jane Hiddleston
feels that ‘Hasina’s naivety and vulnerability, seems on one level to reinforce prevalent assumptions regarding the relentless subordination of women in postcolonial Islamic societies. This could be another reason why Nazneen reaffirms her decision not to go back well aware of the fate which might befall her.

The contrast in lifestyles between the two sisters raises questions about it being a deliberate authorial strategy to show that Nazneen had a better deal only because she was in a First World country unlike suffering Hasina who was caught in a Third World location. Chanu thought he would be revitalized returning to his glorified homeland but it turns out to be something else. His inability to be successful after his return underscores the fact that the West has become an ingrained part of the immigrant’s post-colonial system. Life in Bangladesh might remain the same for the native but is different for the immigrant who has been exposed to a different culture altogether.

Home for Sara Suleri always remains an imagined place which is why the loss associated with it is heightened. Shifting rapidly from one place to another she writes:

There was no longer any need to wait for change, because change was all there was, and we had quite forgotten the flavor of an era that stayed in place long enough to gain a name. One morning I awoke to find that, during the course of the night, my mind had completely ejected the names of all the streets in Pakistan, as though to assure that I could not return, or that if I did, it would be returning to a loss. (Suleri, 18)
‘Where is ‘home’ for the men and women who flit between a Sri Lanka that no longer exists as they knew and an England far from the illusory world of Pearl’s beloved Father Brown mysteries. It is like Prins says, in *The Sandglass* ‘nothing really fits’. One can accept what Rosemary Marangoly George opines about home, “It is within the trope of home that the physical and psychic space converge and coalesce into a potent symbol of the circumscribed and situated self”. The truth about the violence in Sri Lanka and the associated mythical qualities of it being fantasised as Eden, a colonizer’s paradise are all explored in *The Match*, Sunny’s father’s friend Hector advises him against his desire to shift to America:

...Your father is becoming keen on more traditional values. Adolescence has never been part of our culture. In England at least he knows you will have the benefit of a society that has a firm grip. (Gunasekara, *The Match*, 79)

Understanding the directionless desires of his son, Lester sends him to England, so that at least rootless himself his son would search for roots in a society with a foundation. Karim has only secondary impressions of India, a typical second generation brat for whom England is ‘home’. Kureishi’s protagonist identifies himself with his Indian background in the end though he is content with staying on in Britain, Susheila Nasta agrees with Karim’s realisation that ‘home’ is not necessarily linked indissolubly to questions of race or origin but is determined more by an individual’s particular location, the place, ‘where you start from’. Pearl dies in the adopted land – not being able to call either country home and so
do Anoja, her daughter, who dies in childbirth and Ravi her son, who commits suicide. It is only Naomi – her granddaughter who is successful in integrating. Prins refuses to settle down in one place and finally returns to the land of the sun where his end is like his life – mysterious. He scrambled out of England thinking he wanted a break from the tangled up life they had there: “The confusion of being nowhere. It made no sense, and I wanted to get a real life. Find something that would make sense of my life” (Gunesekera, *The Sandglass*, 244–245).

Appadurai’s concept of mediascape and its influence in the closed confines of one’s home in the hostland bring out images of the homeland very strongly. It is a deliberate strategy used by Gunesekera and Ali to reinforce images of the homeland, to make characters more focused in taking decisions. TV reports enslave Sunny, Clara and Chanu’s family as they watch the fall of the twin towers in New York. The medley of confusing images and resulting disorientation, the language of the newscasters all being repeated time and again builds up mesmerizing and yet obscure images where the families watch the same shots time as if in a trance. The postmodern, distorted scenario is disquieting and the proximity of the images in the confines of the house makes both families appreciate the stability of their homes. Nazneen thanks God for having continued as a family, Chanu’s desire to go back home to Bangladesh is reaffirmed while Sunny, unable to sort the images of New York from that of Colombo remains disturbed. The thought which strikes them is, ‘Nothing would be the same, ever.’
**Family** - Family and marriage are important institutions in an Asian society. The emotional bonding associated with it brings about a sense of belonging which is very necessary in the hostland. The NRSA family in the diaspora stands for a site where values, togetherness, ideals are imbibed both directly and indirectly. It is necessary especially for the first generation immigrant woman as a site of bonding as they try to create a second home away from the original one. Arjun Appadurai states in his essay:

> ... deterritorialized communities and displaced populations, however much they may enjoy the fruits of new kinds of earning and new dispositions of capital and technology, have to play out the desires and fantasies of these new ethnoscapes, while striving to reproduce the family – as – microcosm of culture.  

Time and again the family stands as a roosting nest, a shelter point for nurturing, reorienting oneself to face life in the hostland. Avtar Brah opines that the family system is a good support for onslaughts of racism in the hostland. The only complete Asian families seen in the novels taken up are those of – Chanu and Nazneen, Anwar and Jamila. The minor characters whose lives are discussed in Brick Lane act like an extended family with the women giving each other support while facing the pressures of everyday living. Pearl and Jason together do not continue their family life, so only Pearl’s role in conserving her family is taken into consideration. Nazneen and Chanu were not mutually compatible in looks, age,
education and belief systems but they both believed in the importance of bringing up their children properly. The death of their first born brings them closer and with their second generation daughters they face many upheavals trying to acculturate. For Anwar and Jeeta who were united more by the vows of marriage than by love, family life was necessary to handle the pressures of existence in the hostland. Staying together was more of a habit than love, romance, care or consideration. They knew nothing of the outside world and accultured in the hostland as a family only by dint of hard work and because they had no desire to go back to India. Karim, despite all his bohemian ways couldn’t underestimate the importance of family life. The constant friction between his parents and final separation makes him treat Jamila and her parents as an alternative extended family. “It comforted me that there was always somewhere less intense, and warmer, where I could go when my own family had me thinking of running away”. (Kureishi, 52). Anwar feels he is fulfilling his fatherly duty when he gets a boy from India, Changez, to marry Jamila. Continuing in Britain was acceptable to them; her parents felt she would be very happy if she married according to their custom and their caste. Educated with all kinds of theories on feminism and individuality, Jamila succumbs to the family pressures only because of her mother, the family peace and Anwar’s hunger strike, but here she devises her own strategy. She does not accept Changez personally as her husband. Sunny flits along with Clara and Mike flowing along with the tide of life. He is desirous of having a better life than his parents ever did. Pearl tries to sustain her family but the shadow of the past, the gap which came up between her and her children
after she fled Sri Lanka and left the children alone for a period of two years, her daughter's death all makes her family life disconnected and fragmented. The binding factor which runs through the story is her knitting, Pearl knit constantly, knitting family relationships with the same fervour as cardigans. The knitting, is a deliberate narrative ploy on the part of the author, a strategy to bring about a sense of rootedness, and further acculturation in the new homeland, a scheme to keep her children together. Her knitting claims Minoli Salgado reflects not simply her withdrawal into a world she can fashion and control but the very process by which she fails. Melanie A Murray compares her knitting to the ‘traditional quilting’ by American women who piece their lives together in a creative montage. However, Pearl's perspective highlights a sense of reclusiveness and her inability to maintain a family environment. Her womanly instincts and her guilt make her nurture Naomi, her granddaughter and help her to acculturate. Pearl had stifled her daughter Anoja's first romance and had abandoned her for some time with her sons' after Jason's death when she fled to London. She felt, “Maybe it is because I made her a mother to the boys that she couldn’t live to be one, really herself; and that has made me mother to Naomi.” (Gunesekera, The Sandglass, 90). When Naomi needs a home, she stays with Pearl and grows attached to her uncle and grandma. Pearl plans a psychological strategy to help Naomi acculturate independently. Aware that she harbours a guilt complex about moving out Pearl plans with Chip and nudges her out of the house gently, realising, she would have a better life with Dylan “Get out of here before it is too late” – a fact found to be true in the end as she is the only character in the novel
who assimilates and integrates well. “Naomi was the only one who knew no boundaries, or seemed to cross wherever she wished, and whenever she wished”. (Gunesekera, The Sandglass, 95) – balancing the hostland and the homeland. This is a strategy promoted by the author explaining that regeneration is possible only if you cut off all moorings from the homeland, consciously or otherwise. It also endorses the ability in all second generation immigrants – to acculturate and integrate better. As a mother, she was alert when she heard of Prins business deals in Sri Lanka but often steered the topic to other areas where he was not present as though his final geographical rejection of her was too painful to bridge.

Pearl wanted her daughter to acculturate well in the new land but not integrate. She wanted her to show off – project her distinctiveness, her culture, to wear a saree but Anoja was unlike her – conventional, she preferred to merge with the crowd. Nostalgic when she talks about her dead daughter Pearl felt that the entry of Bernard in Anoja’s life changed her, made her talk, bonded them closer finally ‘like a daughter to a mother’. Chanu, who is caught in the immigrant’s dilemma of not being accepted for what he is reverses his acculturation process. He is aware that till a single White man exists there will be nothing for them. He tries to settle, but disillusioned finally turns back home. The difference in the value system upsets him:

Behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper tragedy. ‘I’m talking about the Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve
one’s identity and heritage. I’m talking about children who don’t know what their identity is. I’m talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I’m talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one’s sanity while striving to achieve the best for one’s family.’ (Ali, 92)

Like all South Asian parents, Chanu and Nazneen focus on education for their children as a major strategy of acculturation and are proud of their achievements. But when Chanu finally realizes that the adopted country will never accept him for what he is and going back to Bangladesh is the only answer, he forces his daughters to appreciate the greatness of their homeland, the glory of her history, the Nazrul geet and poetry by great poets. The second generation children, acculturated in the ways of the adopted homeland which is the real ‘home’ for them are unable to relate to a place and a culture they have never known or seen and this results in intergenerational conflicts – a situation which also occurs in The Buddha of Suburbia. When Chanu insists that they learn Bengali and recite Tagore, Shahana rebels by kicking up a fuss and spoils her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them’ (Ali, 180). Aware that the Whites underestimated him he showed different aspects of his temperament at home. If angry with the British, Chanu felt that his children had better be traditional and pro Bangladesh which prompted them to wear trousers under their skirts, but on days when he wanted to defy the British and show that they were not peasants but educated folk, the girls wear allowed to wear skirts or jeans. He was unable to understand his children and yet, tried hard even taking up driving to mitigate his family’s needs in spite of his dreams to make it big academically.
Distance from the home culture and the invisibility of that culture in the hostland create a situation where the family becomes the chief vehicle of cultural transmission. Away from home at a young age Nazneen tries to suppress her feelings of hostility, loneliness in the strange country with the alien tongue by working hard to please her husband, cooking, cleaning and dreaming of home. She constantly worries about the bickering between her husband and her daughters who refuse to accept his dictatorial ways and constant pressure to learn about Bangladesh. Bibi tries to placate him but flippant Shahana’s replies enrage him. Nazneen, struggling with her personal acculturation process tries to maintain the family peace by adopting several methods of reconciliation. She teaches the girls to show respect to their father, delving into her resources learnt in the homeland. When she starts earning she hides some money for Shahana, to buy what she covets – shampoo, lotion, slides for her hair. Out for the first time on a family trip into which much planning and investment have gone both physical and emotional, Nazneen literally bribes Shahana to smile at the camera, promising to buy her the dangling earrings she wanted so badly. Trying to balance her family’s needs was like ‘walking through a field of snakes’ (Ali, 168–169), a hazardous tightrope walk but still then it was worth it.

In spite of the fragmentation, disconnection, sexual exploits, marital infidelity, racist attacks, and the cracks in their marriage – family life is still convincing in the marriages of Anwar and Jeeta, Chanu and Nazneen, Ted and Jean, Sunny and Clara. The family is not projected as a social institution, but rather as a site
of tensions, which calls into question the policy of integration and relationship between different members. Often the family network endorses an understanding of oneself – one’s strengths and weaknesses, one’s acculturated identity which might look at things differently. While the first generation tries to integrate and hold on to the new land devising strategies to acculturate, the second generation ventures out, confident of their location yet needing the support of the family system. Shahana in spite of all her rebellious nature and decision not to go to Bangladesh tenderly hugs her father when he announces his return to Bangladesh, and asks, ‘Who will cook for you there?’ Karim confesses in the end that despite all his strategies to be an Englishman, a mature individual with ‘Top pay. Top Job. Top person’ also it is not easy. ‘.... Maybe you never stop feeling like an eight-year-old in front of your parents.’(Kureishi, 280). He feels contented and happy in the company of the people whom he loves towards the end of the novel. Sunny realises that true contentment for him lies in the company of his wife and son. Anything seems possible. The same feeling is echoed by Chanu. When he learns that Nazneen would not be accompanying him he breaks down:

All these years I dreamed of going home a Big Man. Only now, when it’s nearly for me, I realized what is important. As long as I have my family with me, my wife, my daughters, I am as strong as any man alive.’ (Ali, 400)

Shahana has her own strategies to acculturate into the system at home. If Chanu is angry she wavers between two extremes – either she flippantly answers back driving him to the depths of frustration or she disregards him coolly. If he is in a
good mood she quickly wears her tight, frayed jeans sure that he would not notice. Integration is important to her. Torn by the thought of leaving for Bangladesh she runs away but when she realises that her mother has stayed back to accommodate her children she becomes more responsible. She even plans a treat for her mother and takes her to a skating rink, packing sandwiches with a desi touch, bread with cream cheese and mango pickle. When Nazneen confesses that her children cannot adjust back home and so she would stay back Chanu does not rail or rant. Probably he already knew this outcome. He is neither harsh nor critical before his children but presents a united front, ‘I have suggested, and your mother has agreed, that the three of you come later’ (Ali, 401). It is a touching moment as he lays down his set of rules for the girls, affirming his position as the patriarchal head, and also reaffirming his acculturation mantras:

Be good girls, do as your mother tells you, finish your homework every night, don’t waste time on television and all that rubbish, read Tagore (I recommend Gitanjali), don’t think there’s anything you are not good enough for. . . (Ali, 401–402)

In her article ‘The Immigrant Family: Cultural Legacies and Cultural Changes,’ Foner (1997) stated:

Along with the increasing interest in gender and generation in immigrant families, there is a growing awareness that the family is a place where conflict and negotiation take place. She proposed that “family is seen as a place where there is a dynamic interplay between structure, culture, and agency — where creative culture-building takes place in the context of external social and economic forces as well as immigrants’ premigration cultural frameworks.”14
The NRSA families discussed in the above section highlight this. A major marker of the homeland and the family used in all diasporic writing is ‘food’ which helps in the process of acculturation and at the same time is a powerful reminder of the past home. Food explores the exclusive, elusive concept of ‘home,’ is a construct of memory, a powerful symbol of family bonding and reconnecting in the hostland. It is used as a physical and a psychological strategy, a feast for all the five senses, a major connect for all those displaced from the homeland. It maintains kinship, social and cultural ties as a security, a memory and a reminder of what they had forfeited. Mridula Nath Chakraborty, using Parama Roy’s formulation, in her essay Will the real South Asian stand up please quotes ‘. . . food and language trace a continuous line through the alimentary canal of the diaspora.’

Textualising food becomes a discursive practice that seems to characterise expatriate writers, it is used as a device employed to describe a cultural context, and gives a fulfilling sense of being and belonging. Food is a strategy used to reduce spatial and temporal distances. The availability of food in the hostland is a strategy invoking the past and also a strategy used for keeping the memory of the homeland alive. American cultural critic Ketu Katrak suggests that culinary narratives, suffused with nostalgia, often manage immigrant memories and imagined returns to the “homeland”. Homesickness for the food, smells and companionship of home and family is a common issue with immigrants. Food, becomes both an intellectual and emotional anchor giving them a sense of rootedness. It is a potent symbol, serving both as a placeholder for marking cultural distinctiveness and as a palliative for dislocation.
Pearl exploits food as a physical (sight), psychological (satiation) and emotional (evoking tastes from the distant homeland) strategy aware that it is a major means, probably the only one, to resurrect the homeland in the hostland and connect her children with her. Once a week it was always gut roasting liver curry and butter with rice an occurrence looked forward to by the other Sri Lankans, friends of her children who flocked to eat her home made native food. She thereby connected to her children and her homeland. Pearl also cooked for herself – celebrating special occasions so she could look forward to them – with the onset of the first snow she always had a slice of her special cake. When Prins arrives hearing about Pearl’s death, Chip offers him a piece of haddock microwaved with Madras paste the best he could do in the way of home cooking. (italics mine) – a strategic reminder of home, his mother and the fact that she was no more. Mrs Veeraswamy is described in The Match as ‘...very fond of powerful scents, although hers did not entirely overcome the smell of chilli paste and hot frying oil lacquered in her hair.’ (Gunasekera, The Match, 92). For Haroon who came to London thinking it would be roast beef and Yorkshire pudding all the way it was a culture shock when he saw the real London. It was wet and foggy . . . there was never enough to eat . . . he pushed away the diet of the working class – dripping on toast which he called nose drippings. Even in London what Sunny always picked up was, ‘a couple of samosas and a chicken tikka ; occasionally a curry at the Ceylon restaurant opposite the tube (Gunasekera, The Match, 101). Haroon’s dinner was always kebabs and chapatti which he brought from outside, Karim loved the Indian food in Anwar's
house especially the kebab and chapati with onions and green chillies, a taste he had not grown up with but instinctively liked. Aroused by an indescribable patriotic feeling in the cricket field watching Sri Lanka play, Sunny suddenly desires for Sri Lankan food. He came across fish and chips, crepes, burgers and a tikka masala stall and was disappointed to find ‘no vadai, no bola cutlis, no lampries.’ (Gunesekera, The Match, 263). Surprisingly the desire to have traditional food suddenly comes up the day he is watching a cricket match in a stadium with spectators from his own country sharing the same passion, the same language. Traditional food plays an important role in Brick Lane with Nazneen a simple village girl spending a considerable time cooking everyday dishes. Food unites the couple further, joining them in their grief as Chanu takes over the role of househusband during the time their first born is in hospital. Plagued by anxiety during her affair with Karim she treats food like a palliative: ‘She spent the night eating leftovers in the kitchen as if layer on layer of food inside her would push out the anxiety, displace it like water from a bath. (Ali, 249). When she has a nervous breakdown, and Chanu cooks to aid her recovery, the satiation in the regular, identifiable food acts as a psychological boost to her recovery. Sara Suleri herself points out that immigrants remain deeply invested in ‘the ontological coherency of their culinary memories’. During a discussion about food, with her sister in the hostland they become both adamant and passionate about the eating habits of their motherland and ironically have an argument about native food. Anita Mannur states that the second chapter in Meatless Days is an extended meditation on culinary memories from Suleri’s pre emigration
childhood, which informs her experience in Connecticut and New York. It also draws attention to the mechanisms by which diasporic subjects grapple with the desire to fix memories and nostalgise about the past.\textsuperscript{17} Culinary emerges as an important counter discourse which destabilizes the mechanisms by which gendered national subjectivity is granted visibility and legitimacy in postcolonial spaces. Nazneen’s confession that she was staying back in London releases something inside her. Feeling hungry she takes the ingredients for a simple dal and rice out of a packed carton and busily gets into cooking with her children too clamouring for food. ‘The spices began to catch and gave off their round and intricate smell. It was a scent that made all others flat; it existed in spheres, the other in thin circles.’ (Ali, 401). With the satiation in their hunger came clarity in thought as Nazneen decisively says, ‘We’ll talk about it tomorrow or later and we’ll decide what to do. Staying or going, it’s up to us three.’ (Ali, 402)

The second generation is shown to merge both cultures especially in matters of food and clothes. Hybrid variations emerge. Back home there was traditional food though the preference lay with the food from the hostland. This age group was caught between cultures in an intergenerational rift because they always desired for difference. Shahana and Bibi loved ‘burgers or baked beans’ (Ali, 321) ate onion bhajis ‘smothered in tomato ketchup’ (Ali, 337) and ‘rolled their Dairy Lea cheese inside a chapatti’ (Ali, 246).
Women

The South Asian Diasporic woman is a category by herself. As Clifford writes:

Life for women in diasporic situations can be doubly painful – struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, the demands of family and work, and with the claims of old and new patriarchies. . . .Women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a ‘home’ culture and a tradition.¹⁸

Keeping in balance one’s shifting idealism, identity and integrity amidst adversity and violence the diasporic women represent the new multicultural and ethnic woman of the New World representing the consciousness of the one who is involved in crossing over and in perpetual transition thereby avoiding unitary paradigms and dualistic thought and giving rise to a transnational sense of being. The traditional values, these women forcefully endorsed from the ancestral culture were related to family, motherhood, people-oriented values, religion, and marriage; the contemporary values they admired and sought from the host culture pertained to education, career, and opportunity for independence of spirit. The identity negotiations undertaken by South Asian women involve several fronts: home, language, customs, food, and the voices of parents, peers, language, siblings, homeland and the society. As post-colonial women all the women immigrants of the first generation are doubly marginalized, primarily as they are post-colonial subjects and secondly because they are women.
Notions of Asian femininity, included cooking wholesome food for the family, being family oriented, sacrificing, obedient – images which have their origins in post-world war narratives where women were represented as subordinate and dependent. The domestic arena, so frequently associated with femininity, also becomes a space to reproduce cultural and national identity. It is often opined that the women of the first generation presented in diasporic writing are uninspiring stereotypes, desexualised and passive. It is the second generation who has managed to balance both worlds and to integrate themselves at different levels and create a hybrid ‘Third Space’ for themselves. These Young adults are faced with the challenge of creating a ‘cultural identity’ which incorporates elements of their heritage and the receiving cultures, customs, habits, myths, religion, moral attitudes. Immigrants of the first generation are presented as socialising only within their family network since they are dependent on the will of their husbands. But the friendship they create is loyal, with single minded devotion they place their homes on the priority list and as they strategise by becoming more proficient in the situations they encounter there is created a beautiful sorority between them which sometimes helps them to acculturate better in the alien land. This closeness helps in countering feelings of alienation and loneliness in the new land. As bell hooks puts it:

At times home is nowhere. At times, one only knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.\textsuperscript{19}
Both the novels of Gunsekera do not focus on women characters. *The Sandglass* sketches out the story of Pearl's life from the characters in the story. The next important character highlighted is her granddaughter, Naomi. *The Match* brings out the role of Clara who stays with Sunny and bears his child but they do not marry till the end. Tina, a Sri Lankan known to Sunny provides a romantic interest for some time and the author also provides inputs about Sunny's mother but it is barely an outline and sometimes quite blurred. She commits suicide, a fact for which Sunny blames his father. England becomes Pearl's second and final home. It was as if she used knitting as a strategy as she reflected over her past, trying to link both the past and the present, keep Sri Lanka alive in her mind, relive the relationships and tie all inextricably in an indefinable bond. Her knitting is a physical strategy with psychological overtones as it can be visualized as a withdrawal into a world she can fashion and control by journeying into the past in the present trying to see things in a different perspective. It is a narratorial device used by the author to reduce the fragmentation of images – the fragments creating a patchwork of separate tales within a single theme – her past in Sri Lanka. The semblance of centeredness in her being rooted to one place physically because of her ailing health is only a facade. She wishes for time to pause, sure that she can establish some sense of order if only time will stop falling through the sandglass. Pearl's withdrawal from an active lifestyle, rootedness in Britain, memories of Sri Lanka, her split cultural identity, brings about a fragmentation in the narrative but her longing for the past is only a desire – she makes no effort to go back. Her motto was, 'You have to
live your life as you see it’. Her strategy of holding on to the past but not going back physically to Sri Lanka even confuses Chip who spends more time with her than any of her children. Her lonely end in the hospital with only the three of them was deliberate, as Chip relates ‘slowly, patiently, clipped away’. The pattern of her life was complete. She had tied all loose ends in her life and finally even settled Naomi.

Her stories leave Chip feeling that her life was crowded, that she knew many people:

. . . that somehow all the people of her past were constantly moving in and out of her sitting room. That she was in touch with everything and everyone all the time. Instead it seems we were all she had, beside the brush light of the TV screen, disembodied voices on the radio and junk mail. Where were the figures from her past? . . . The people from those early years in London? Were they all only in her head, evaporated ghosts in the ether of our collective memory. . . (Gunesekeeria, *The Sandglas*, 247)

Pearl blames the passage of time and not the move to London as the real issue. For Pearl the hours are the enemy, it is time, not distance, that will strain her relationship with the children – years, not space, which will confound her ideas of postcolonial place.

The discord between Pearl and her husband Jason, his overpowering desire for land and acquisitions, a postcolonial craving for power distances her. Jason's
death, Pearl’s trip to England where she tries to acculturate with her children is a deliberate narrative ploy on the part of the author, a strategy aimed to bring about some rootedness, an attempt to keep her children together in this unknown land she adopts as her new homeland, for she is aware she would fail in Sri Lanka. The journey from the homeland to the dream land however, does not contain her.

Nazneen strategizes in the hostland by obeying the legacy she has inherited from her mother – a strategy not taught and not enforced – a strategy willed down from her mother with her values, her milk, her love for her child, her stories – a legacy of ‘acceptance’. Fresh from Gouripur she accepts everything initially. She does not argue, but remains quiet, passive restraining her anger:

‘Just wait and see, that’s all we can do’. How often she had heard these words. Amma always wiped away her tears with those words. When the harvest was poor, when her own mother was taken ill, when floods threatened, when Abba disappeared and stayed away for days at a time. She cried because crying was called for, but she accepted it, whatever it was. (Ali, 36)

She often dreamt of Amma and found herself hallucinating asking her for advice when tormented by doubts – the umbilical cord had not snapped – she was like the ‘voice of her conscience’. Calling out to her mother was a psychological strategy, a need for reassurance that all was well, things could be handled – a return to the safety and security of the womb. Nazneen realizes that adaptation would be best achieved through conformity with her husband and the system –
she uses this understanding as a strategy to assimilate. The purdah covers and contains her body, and the flat – her life. She continues to act as the dutiful wife even if she is angry that Chanu does not agree to help Hasina:

Nazneen dropped the promotion from her prayers. The next day she chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer. The razor slipped when she cut his corns. His files got mixed up when she tidied. All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within.' (Ali, 50)

It was a strategy to make him understand she was upset, a strategy involving both physical and psychological overtones found again only with Jamila from the second generation. When Jamila inspite of her knowledge, intelligence and understanding is forced to marry because of the patriarchal system to an ignoramus she does so only in letter not by spirit – her rebellion a strategic opposition against her father and the society.

Nazneen conforms to the expected role of immigrant, wife and mother as prescribed through generations and adheres to this for some time. She has no other choice and knows no other option. It is a strategy to acculturate in her new environment as though she is testing the waters before taking a plunge. Ironically for the first generation, a deeper understanding of themselves and their personal culture makes them realise the importance of assimilating in the new world and so they strategise, as going back to a life without certain comforts doesn't appeal
to them. She takes small steps to assuage her own independence. She walks unaccompanied into the midst of the city and is startled by her observations as well as by her ability to negotiate the alien world. She fights alone and is overwhelmed by her personal victories. A fit of anger against her husband causes her to celebrate internally her achievement as a non English speaking Bangladeshi woman lost, alone and pregnant in London:

Anything is possible. She wanted to shout it. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile around the whole of London, although I did not see the edge of it. And to get home I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked directions. See what I can do! (Ali, 62-63).

She strategises by showing an ability to adapt, assimilate, blend cultural influences, defy stereotypes and find fulfillment. She uses all strategies – physical, cultural, social, psychological and also spiritual. She moves away from nostalgia to focus on changing identities and establishing new relationships, by exhibiting a deep awareness of the social reality surrounding the immigrants. The consequences of migration were different for men and women as it merely realigned the existing patriarchal systems. The multi-cultural scenario led to confrontation and the struggle for a new life, but nevertheless, a complete break from the past was improbable. Ali stresses the need to acculturate and adapt oneself. The acculturation process which results in Nazneen adapting and acquiring an empowered identity is governed by her own personal logic and
homespun insight. Her metamorphosis and self-realization is a triumph of the cross cultural intersection reflecting the hybrid, multicultural, modern British society. Hasina’s letters not only give her a reason to acculturate in this land of opportunities – a fact which the author endorses through Razia’s dialogue in the end but also make her strategise to deal with her husband, her children. Chanu’s advice shows the colonized’s control over another – he gave orders expecting submission she need not learn English, need not work and need not maintain any contact with people like Razia. Nazneen after a point rebels, ultimately achieves economic empowerment, decides confidently, makes her moves correctly and assured that she is taking the correct step – stays back. Britain is no longer the hostland it becomes the adopted homeland. It is towards the end of the novel that Nazneen shifts from complacency to questioning her positioning and role. Her capability to adjust in a multicultural context is central to the novel. Monica Ali raises questions about the cultural consequences of dislocation and displacement through migration and underlines their role in creating the identity of the individuals within the story. Sara though from a close knit, large joint family shows greater adaptability in the West clarifying that back home in Pakistan:

the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy just for that, just living, conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a wife or a mother or a servant.(Suleri, 1)
Nazneen, Razia, Jorina are shown to be products of ideologies, social practices and social structures where race and class are key determinants. Straddling both worlds they play a unique role within transnational communities as the author highlights their role in strengthening kinship ties, keeping the family intact being a part of the west and yet not totally absolving oneself from the East. Nazneen is portrayed as a very docile person deep-dyed in the notion of fatality. Her mother’s quiet courage and tearful stoicism is drummed into her existence, instilling in her a passive acceptance of everything that life brings. Her mimicry of the dominant culture is essential to survive or is it a positive, proactive step to be one with the mainstream culture. It dawns on Nazneen that she finds her life dictated by two men, until she decides ‘I will decide what to do; I will say what happens to me. I will be the one’ (Ali, 337). She finds herself making decisions on her own, achieving a kind of personal happiness which she realises with a shock she does not have to share with Chanu or her daughters. It was her own.

Seeing women in control around her:

Suddenly she is gripped by the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate, and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would – how could she not? – skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. For a glorious moment it was clear that the clothes, not fate, made her life. And if the moment had lasted she would have ripped the saree off and torn it to shreds. (Ali, 229–230)
Nazneen’s will to survive starts with a dissection of her attire. Her clothes and veil sometimes hampered her, stifled her personality. This idea is probably an acculturative strategy by the writer to bring about a complete change of persona – from external to internal. Having summoned the courage to defy her husband, aware that going back would have been a disaster for her daughters and the realisation that she would not be able to live life on her own terms makes Nazneen refuse to accompany him. She devises strategies to start afresh. She is the one who also finally distances herself from Karim and her former perception of him, and admits after much introspection:

‘I wasn’t me, and you weren’t you. From the very beginning to the very end, we didn’t see things. What we did – we made each other up’ (Ali, 380).

Her relationship relied on an image she had fabricated, a youthful fantasy, a constructed simulacrum, rather than on any understanding of his substance. Concomitantly, Karim created her character as an idea of home. It was an idea of himself that he found in her and both lovers reshaped the other to suit their needs, satisfy their private fantasies – an idea which she left behind voluntarily on her journey towards acculturation. Agency is further conferred on her by Chanu, Karim, Razia all help in her process of acculturation.

Mrs. Azad’s candid confession is a strategic one by the author to make Nazneen aware of various interpretations which an immigrant woman can also have of her
life. Mrs. Azad’s acculturation is a kind of assimilation, wherein she wants to be one with the mainstream British identity, instead of clinging on to a Bangladeshi immigrant identity. As she says very rightly, the immigrants want the host culture to change for them, but do not change themselves to adapt to the host culture. She and her daughter have assimilated completely whether it is in clothes, mannerisms or their way of life there are no more strategies to undertake. There is an understanding and integration beyond mimicry. Neighbors and ladies belonging to the kinship group helped in acculturating by forming networks which provided support, with their varied experiences which proved helpful in solving each other’s problems. Nazneen, Razia, Jorina are shown to be constructs of ideologies, social practices and social structures where race and class are key determinants. Straddling both worlds, they play a unique role within transnational communities as the author highlights their role. They strategise to strengthen kinship ties, keep the family intact, are a part of the West and yet not totally absolved from the East. They discuss financial problems, marital issues, racism and create strategies to handle them. Mrs. Islam was a usurer and even in the hostland, her strategy was to provide loans at high rates to the Bangladeshis who found it difficult to make ends meet. Razia assimilates into the system by changing her dress, language and lifestyle gradually when she realizes that her husband worked obsessively, only to provide for the construction of a mosque in the homeland. After his death, it was Razia’s spirit which leads her to run her family. Her integration into the system helps her get a job and ironically despite being shunned for her unladylike ways, it was her entrepreneurial skills which
provided many women, economic gain. She was aware going back to her country was not possible; neither would she be able to manage to bring up her two children. She voices her feelings before Nazneen:

Ask him this, then. Is it better than our own country, or is it worse? If it is worse then why is he here? If it is better, why does he complain? ...There are good ones, and bad ones. Just like us. And some of them you can be friendly with. Some aren’t so friendly. But they leave us alone, and we leave them alone. That’s enough for me. … Something else: if you don’t have a job here, they give you money. Did you know that? You can have somewhere to live, without any rent. Your children can go to school. And on top of that, they give you money. What would happen at home? Can you eat without working? Can you have a roof over your head? (Ali, 58)

But it is finally Mrs Azad, the doctors wife who practically brings out all the aspects of assimilation. She states pragmatically that when in Bangladesh she ‘wears a saree and covers her head’ but in London:

But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I’m just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry, that’s my business. Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English…They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street, they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don’t have to change one thing. That is the tragedy.’(Ali, 114)

Internal integration occurs when religious and cultural habits are accommodated and this is what finally takes place with Mrs. Azad and her daughter. There are
no negotiations, no voices, no guilt complexes. The acculturation process is complete.

Yasmin Hussain in *Writing Diaspora* says:

> During the transactions of daily rituals, the women in the novel detect similarities and differences between the surrounding environment and those that they always known. They gradually become better acquainted with various aspects of living within Britain, becoming proficient in dealing with the situations they encounter.

Women, in *The Buddha of Suburbia* are marginalised with the exception of Jamila who barring her race and colour is in every way equal to a native. There are distant autobiographical elements in Kureishi’s images of womanhood and mothers. The English mother, Margaret is perceived as a marginal character coming into her own only after her husband leaves her. As she is a native like Eva, Jean and Tracey, their character traits are not explored. Like Karim’s mother Sara’s mama is also a British national Mair Jones whose name is converted to Begum Surraya Suleri once she is married in Pakistan. Sara often wonders at her father’s choice of bride and questions if it was a symbolic taking over of a possession – of what the colonial empire had taken away. Jeeta, Anwar’s wife adjusts as an immigrant the hard way, though back home she was a Princess from Pakistan. Shy and illiterate she makes her husband turn his unprofitable toy shop into a grocery shop after which they prosper. Jeeta is virtually imprisoned by her everyday work at the ironically titled ‘Paradise Stores’.
With her husband’s physical decline after his hunger strike, she became more strong and willful acculturating into the language with ease. She strategises cleverly how to deprive him of what he wants till, as Karim says ‘he started to suffer the malnutrition of unalloyed seriousness’ (Kureishi, 208). She creates more space in the stores, and handles a flourishing business. After her husband’s death she does not talk about returning to Pakistan but is already charged to change the store and branch off into other commodities. Kureishi’s first-generation women are presented as more deracinated than their husbands, with a much more straightforward relationship to home – a practical approach not found in their men. The desire to acculturate is strong enough to make her strategise how to fob off the racists and she sleeps with buckets of water around the bed. *Meatless Days* is unique in many ways as the author belongs to the Third World and is yet westernised in her approach. Teaching in America she faces problems explaining the term Third World as a, ‘discourse of convenience’ to her First World students. Trying to find it is like pretending that history or home is real and not located precisely where you ‘re sitting....’(Suleri, 20). Suleri foregrounds female bodies in the text. Pakistan’s patriarchal society bring up notions of virginity, childbearing, beauty and aspects of victimization and power and violence are also traced. What Sara remembers is that her brothers were allowed to play outside whereas she, her mother and sisters had to stay indoors – a dictum passed by her father. Her book is subtitled,‘a memoir’ where she addresses different issues while staying abroad. Probably her stay there is possible only because she learns from her experience. Suleri reveals a strategy
she has learnt from her mother, ‘a study of tangentiality that allows women to survive in alien lands.

K. Satchidanandan opines:

The experience of the second generation or third generation migrant is very different from that of the first generation migrant: home becomes unreal to them, just a space of imagination rather than of nostalgic recollection... They reconstruct their homeland from fragments of information gathered from hearsay or from the internet. For them, home is not a place to return to, but a place to fantasize about, or maybe to visit some time as a guest or a tourist.

Jamila acts as the ‘moral centre’ of the novel, as Karim’s alter ego and the voice of his conscience – an authorial strategy to make him aware of his wrong demeanours and provide a contrast to Karim’s character. She strategises by being committed to the fight for oppressed people – who face violence every day. She planned her studies systematically, is a fan of Simone de Beauvoir. She listened to the music of Bessie Smith and Ella Fitzgerald and carried a photograph of Angela Davis in her pocket. She lives life on her own terms – her sustained commitment a developed, planned tactic presented as contributing to a more sustained viewpoint. She marched forward, an Indian woman, to live an useful life in White England always ready to take up a valid cause for the South Asians. It is because of her that Changez changes from a traditional and frustrated good for nothing to a dedicated, efficient househusband. He had no
option – nobody wanted him back in India and years of being a parasite had left him with no talent for a job. She turns traditions upside down because her goal is to rescue the decadent migrant in the hybrid context she is living in. For Jamila the adopted homeland has become her real home and so she integrates further into a socialist group another attempt at acculturation – one had to belong somewhere. It is an irony that reacting towards the imposition of the marriage, she withdraws from her family, maintains her feminist stance and starts a friendship with Changez's Japanese courtesan, Shinko, as if to seek an outer social milieu, protected from male predominance and also to encourage the two of them – with Shinko, Changez would not make overtures and she could continue to integrate into the system.

Second generation characters in Brick Lane Shahana and Bibi or Razia's children Tariq and Shefali assimilate with their new ethnic hybrid Brit-Bangla attitude much better in the British culture. Shefali goes to the university and Sorupa's nephew to Oxford. Born in Britain, their acceptance of its culture is more enthusiastic and natural than that of their country of origin, the country they have not seen. Their identity struggles are different from the earlier generation. They are not trying to fit into a culture but rather attempt to find their own space between the two cultures by drawing on what they have been brought up with and either appropriating or rejecting the culture of their parents. They attempt to integrate within their Third Space with inputs from both sides. Intergenerational conflicts arise between Nazneen's daughters, Shahana and Bibi and her
husband Chanu. Bibi and Shahana in the novel are extremely mobile in linguist, religious and cultural terms. Shahana is the rebel and Bibi is the follower while Nazneen has to often negotiate as the buffer for all the intergenerational conflicts. Bibi is more effective as a cultural navigator; she learns how to behave correctly with the situations which arise because of her father’s erratic mood swings. She can as (Ballard, 1994) suggested ‘switch codes’ as necessary. She does not create the conflicting situations which are produced by her older sister. Not very affected by the immigrant issue, tales of Bangladesh and her parents desire to go back, she decides to listen to her father and adheres to the image he wishes to see of her as a young woman – she wears what he likes and parrot like mumbles the answers to the questions he asks. Shahana’s conflict arises from her desire not to behave appropriately. Bibi effectively switches smoothly from one cultural and linguistic code to the next, her sister frequently fails purposely. The children are also confused with the pro/reverse acculturation shown here by Chanu: sometimes he supports the British sometimes he is against them. Yasmin Hussain feels that for Shahana:

The problems arise when the switch is made to a second British code that is regarded as unacceptable from the perspective of the Bangladeshi father. The systems existing in the social environment are mainly in the form of reference groups, whether these are peer or family. These systems develop when the cultural norms of the community are strengthened through the member’s conformity. The ways in which an individual adapts to, and participates in, these different systems are due to social learning: the individuals learn how to behave within a specific cultural framework. The community culture of which the girls are part becomes a reference group which serves as a resource of attitudes and values, the basis for social learning.”
The belligerent Shahana throws up various strategies to refuse to learn about Bangladesh and its past. She loves London and considers herself as totally integrated into the system. She wants to wear fitting jeans, and defiantly kicks the salwar kameez which her mother wants her to wear. Assimilation is important to her and she refuses to identify with the cultural referents belonging to her parents. Everything connected to Bangladesh was to her teenage rebellious mind, ‘Bor-ring’. Her oft repeated statement was ‘I did not ask to be born here’. Her ultimate rebellious stance comes when she runs away from home to avoid going to Bangladesh – a stand which helps reinforce Nazneen’s decision to stay back. Nazneen’s strategies at acculturating herself in the ways of the country are strengthened here. For Naomi the reconciliation and resolving of problems in *The Sandglass* is possible only because she looks ahead to integration not only by agreeing to marry the Welsh born Dylan but not returning to her motherland. She decides to stay back, endorse the dominant culture assimilate. One can conjecture that the best survivor in the generation would be Dawn, the great granddaughter – a third gen product of Sri Lanka and UK. Kureishi explores the impact on identity formation and projects the first generation as having the right to be there – a fact which was not questioned unlike the second generation who examined their positioning themselves and took time to decide to which country they belonged.
Speaking of Identity, Scheffer in his landmark book *Diaspora Politics* points out to the endless cultural, social, economic and political struggles of the dispersed ethnic groups permanently residing in host countries away from their homelands and other dispersed groups from the same nations. These are neither “imagined nor “invented “communities. Their identities are intricate combinations of primordial, psychological mythical and instrumental elements. These identities may undergo certain adaptations to changing circumstances, yet they do not lose their core characteristics. Hall explains that Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think we should think of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within representation.

Karim the postmodern Everyman, is the new breed produced by divorces and a multiracial, multicultural England. Karim strategizes to belong in different roles – as a son to his Indian father, as a son again to Uncle Anwar and Aunt Jeeta who are his second family, as a lover to both Jamila and Charlie, a best friend to Changez, a confidante to Uncle Ted and a nephew to Aunt Jean. Karim defines himself as ‘an Englishman bred and born, almost’. He straddles two cultures, reluctant about acknowledging his Indian link, strategises to belong till he realises that he will always be considered an outsider by the Whites as Kureishi subverts all fixed ideas of identity and belonging. As Ruvani Ranasinha exemplifies,
“Karim / Kureishi is not simply positioned against the dominant culture, he takes that form of resistance as a given he questions all forms of subcultures, affiliations, and subjectivities. Susheila Nasta feels that Karim, the protagonist of Kureishi’s first novel can home in on English culture, in a way that Haroon, his father, who is still in many ways caught up in a Naipaulian discourse of arrival and loss, cannot. He explains, I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories” (Kureishi,3), so as to fulfill his expiatory rite.( Kureishi,130). Describing his father’s condition he says: ‘I am British; I can make it in England. It’s my father who is caught, He can’t make it.’ The self-styled ‘Everyman’ of the late twentieth century has realised that the figure of the ‘immigrant’, becomes the physical sign and symbolic trope of late twentieth century modernity. Like his creator Kureshi, Karim the ‘cultural translator’ has tried different strategies with his outlandish clothes and hippie styles. There are plenty of autobiographical, hints of Kureishi’s Indo – Pakistani background but paradoxically he seems to suggest that migrants should operate a double, cathartic process for accepting and changing mainstream society in order to acquire visibility and respect.24

When his white upper class girlfriend whom he fancies finds his South London street voice and accent as cute he decides that it has to go as whatever it was, it would go.

I would speak like her. It wasn’t difficult I’d left my world; I had to, I had to get on (Kureishi, 178).
He shirks having to do anything with India and Indian ways, unwilling even to pick up the accent required for the role of Mowgli. When Shadwell clarifies that he had been picked up for authenticity and not for experience Karim reluctantly takes up the role though he disrupts the show sometimes by relapsing into a Cockney accent and making the audience laugh. It was his strategy to acculturate with the natives where he acknowledges himself as part of them, not brown. Kureishi ironically points out how Karim has to strategise being an Indian and act it out – adopt the very persona he was trying to run away from. Despite his strategies, his desire to belong, his numerous lies, his desire to pursue physical pleasure as the only route to showing off as a success he gradually realises that his life as an actor is filled with artifice and a lack of real bonding with anybody. Considering the fact that character or identity is not static but moves on, the conclusion of Karim’s role does read positively as a major realisation, a reinscription of life:

I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I’d struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. . . I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way.(Kureishi, 284).

Karim tries to use his performance as a means to end his identity crisis as he performs excellently. This becomes finally a strategy, a means to resolve the discontent, sense of unbelonging and acculturate better.

I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life
denying or avoiding the fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, *those whites who wanted Indians to be like them* (Kureishi, 212). (emphasis mine)

The splintered self, is divided between a cultural identity that has been rendered irrelevant and a social identity yet to be found. The scattering of identities in Karim is made further evident in his stage experiences, which force him to assume a hyphenated position: an Indian / Pakistani boy as the Kiplingian Mowgli, a disturbing label that evokes or pretends to evoke what the director Shadwell defines as ‘authenticity,’ a goal that can be reached by wearing make-up and carefully posing. Karim’s sense of identity was fractured and divided because of the conflict between what he thought he was and what society perceived him to be. He continues playing the role but there is a difference:

he uncovered notions, connections, initiatives, I didn’t know were present in my mind{…} I saw that creation {of an identity} was an accretive process which couldn’t be hurried, and which involved patience and primarily, love. I felt more solid myself and not as if my mind were just a kind of cinema for myriad emotions and emotions to flicker through. (Kureishi, 217).

And so the strategies to acculturate with immigrants start right from childhood – because they are not allowed to be what they want to be. Karim states about the condition of the second generation immigrant whose situation is the same in a majority of diasporic literature:
‘. . . sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went Black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it’ (Kureishi, 53).

His recognition in acting establishes a new self-made notion of identity, in which the Brit Asian roots fuse and give a new twist to his opening phrase ‘I am an Englishman, “born and bred, almost’ – a statement to be echoed by many second generation immigrants after him. Schwartz has defined Identity as, “a synthesis of personal, social and cultural self-conceptions”.  

Karim thus accepts the role the white society wants him to accept. He internalizes it, so it is very important to understand that the role Karim accepts in the play is in actuality a reflection of the overall social reality he faces every day. Jamila strategizes differently and with more intelligence. She grew up in the London suburbs surrounded by racism and she was subconsciously forced to transform her cultural identity from an early age, to become more integrated into society, which would make her life a lot easier in terms of her social and cultural positioning. She is however, aware of her limitations as a second gen immigrant. She grew up in the London suburbs surrounded by racism and she was subconsciously forced to transform her cultural identity from an early age, to become more integrated into society, which would make her life a lot easier in terms of her social and cultural positioning. Sometimes assimilation is forced on the characters especially by well-meaning natives whites, who show their
acceptance in different ways like rechristening them with anglicized names – and so negotiating themselves in this society Haroon becomes ‘Harry, Jamila, ‘Jammie’. While Karim strategises to integrate, Jamila doesn’t take things lying down but fights back.

Karim who has been compared by Susheila Nasta to be an anti-hero, strategises by polyphony and parodic inversion to belong. Karim remains from the beginning, ‘I am an Englishman born and bred almost...’and in the last part of the novel, ‘And so I sat in the centre of this old city I loved...inhabiting as John Clement Ball suggests a, ‘a cosmopolitan space not fully attached to or detached from either British nation – space or some nationless world – space.’

Chanu, the archetype of the Bangladeshi migrant feels, ‘To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy.’ (Ali, 91). Chanu is the only immigrant who returns for good to Bangladesh unable to face the fact of not realizing his dream of making it big and visiting back as a successful man. He criticises the existence of a homogenised view of all Asians in the British imagination and is unable to accept that inspite of his academic credentials, he is still not an equal.

‘... most of our people here are Sylhetis. They all stick together because they come from the same district. They know each other from the villages, and they come to Tower Hamlets and they think they are back in the village. Most of them have jumped ship. That’s how they come. They have menial jobs on the ship, doing donkey work, or they stow away like little rats in the hold’ ‘... And when they jump ship and scuttle over here, then in a sense they are home again. And you see, to a white person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan. But these
people are peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition.’ ‘... I don’t look down on them, but what can you do? If a man has only ever driven a rickshaw and never in his life held a book in his hand, then what can you expect from him?’ – (Ali, 21)

He tries to differentiate between himself and the illiterate Bangladeshi members. He considers himself to be an educated and cultivated man ready for integration into the society which would be glad to take him in, and therefore, insists on establishing connections only with educated members of the Asian community such as Dr. Azad. This was Chanu’s strategy to acculturate – binding only with the educated.

When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.’...And then I found things were a bit different. These people here did not know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. What can you do?’...‘I will be a success, come what may. That’s promise number one. Number two, I will go back home. When I am a success. And I will honour these promises.’...‘the begging letters still come,’ said Chanu. ‘From old servants, from the children of servants. Even from my own family, although they are not in need. All they can think of is money. They think there is gold lying about in the streets here and I am just hoarding it all in my palace. (Ali, 26)

Chanu strategizes to belong in many other ways. Mentally his psyche is still colonized and he seeks a stamp of approval by possessing a colonial identity.

Ali’s sketch of Chanu’s attempt at assimilation resembles the first level of colonial
assimilation in the tripartite schema of Frantz Fanon where the colonized assimilates with the colonizer but in the process suffers from feelings of inferiority and social invisibility. The lack of acceptance made him denounce the Whites but his inferiority complex made him seek approval from the colonizer, as if the approval from the colonizer had great value. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, “Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity”. Chanu is still in the phase of in-between’s; wherein his independent identity is still in process, so he still lives between the grafted European cultural systems. In one breath, he would condemn colonization, and in another breath he would seek approval from the colonizer, as if the approval from the colonizer had great value. Even though, living in the post-colonial era he could not shake off what is known as the first stage of the colonized persona; the stage of assimilation with the colonizer, wherein the colonized tries hard to be the perfect replicas of the colonizer. The same also occurs with Haroon who also strategises to belong – because he knew his stakes as an immigrant either made him an ‘exotic other’ or an ‘ordinary migrant’ off the boat and so he simulated his cultural identity. Ruvani Ranasinha suggests that the simulation of cultural identity suggest a degree of agency on the part of the performer: he/she in control of his / her ‘self’ construction rather than being defined. Haroon strategises to be different – more of an Englishman, who knew how to market his Indian-ness to assimilate, forgetting his roots. Sunny drifted along rootless, aimlessly to some
extent like Prins who again set out on a different trajectory – returns to Sri Lanka. Chanu is different from Haroon in the sense he is hardworking, punctual and regular – it is the lack of promotion and an understanding of his capabilities that make him rail at the system he believed in and worked so hard to assimilate in. The need to integrate is a need that every immigrant understands to some extent, when he or she comes to a host country. The clash of cultures that Chanu is talking about here is not only non-acceptance of the culture of the West/Britain by the immigrant, but also the non-acceptance on the part of the British or the host nation of the immigrant.’

Michael Perfect proffers the opinion that the characters in the novel acculturate better because they are stereotypes. Memory here is both collective and cultural and identity is a fluid one shaping and reshaping into various visions of the homeland. Reconstitution of identity can again be seen in terms of reclamation of cultural traditions and history – the victims of which were Shahana and Bibi. This was a strategy by Chanu to survive – to go ahead one had to look backwards. DR. Azad had come to the country with his wife and child who integrated immediately. The doctor had a soft spot for his countrymen and tried to help them out as a doctor, a counselor, a friend and also gave money when required.

Many other NRSA’s do not toe the line and instead focus on violence, drug abuse and crime in the multicultural setup which encourages loneliness and
feelings of exclusion – like Tariq from *Brick Lane*. Dislocation and displacement are the postcolonial effects of migration and how to acculturate necessitates strategies to be developed. The answers are to be found by the immigrants themselves. Karim, the firebrand in *Brick Lane* goes to Bangladesh though it is not where he was born probably to justify his political stand. Prins, Ravi, Anoja fail to make it in the hostland and dissipate altogether. Doubly marginalized as ‘exiles’ and the ‘racial other’, Prins shows a lack of fixity and exhibits rootlessness – afflictions common to both exiles and immigrants. His vanishing and the inconclusive end of Ravi are both physical as well as psychological strategies plotted by the author, the inconclusiveness reinforcing the similar condition of the nation – Sri Lanka ravaged by war with no end in sight. Chips attempting to appropriate stories has personally minimal strategies of acculturation. Characters like Amar renamed Allie attempt to integrate and deliberately slough off their origins and mixed parentage. They adopt the strategy of integration so that they avoid all kinds of humiliation, trouble and acceptability issues. Amar callees himself Allie not because he was ashamed of his background but because he wanted, ‘to avoid racial trouble.’ (Kureishi, 19)

Changez acculturates the best and the fastest aware that this was the only escape route offered to him with his dowry in what turns out to be an unconventional marriage. Changez embodies more pathetically and fully than any other immigrant character the process of acculturation. He gradually becomes the loyal servant and follower he strategises to stay back because he
cannot go back home. He loves Jamila and his fantasies of ‘different positions’ are fulfilled by the Japanese Shinko. He is physically attacked; racial slurs are hurled at him. Changez understands that he needs to make compromises in order to find his place in British society. He changes from a would-be patriarch into a ‘maternal’ caring figure in so far that he takes care of Jamila’s baby in the commune Jamila joined. The caricature of the stereotyped immigrant covered with rags even acquires the deformity of the ‘freak’ with his handicapped arm, and becomes the paradigm of the alien ‘other’: his rough grotesqueness is presented so as to reveal the émigré’s quintessence, as if the corruption of his crippled body should indicate a physical powerlessness.

Kureishi’s father migrated from Mumbai to study law in 1947 and is portrayed in the character of Haroon. Not knowing what would be marketable, he had a ready set of books on Buddhism, Sufism, Confucianism and Zen which he had bought from the nearby Oriental bookshop into which he delved when the need arose. This was part of his strategy to acculturate. When his pretentious behaviour is accepted because of his background, it makes him, even modify his speaking style ‘. . .hissing his s’s and exaggerating his Indian accent in order to become the Buddha of Suburbia.(Kureishi, 21). His strategy to acculturate even included carrying a tiny blue dictionary, the size of a matchbox making sure to learn a new word every day. His point, ‘You never know when you might need a heavy weight word to impress an Englishman.’(Kuresihi, 28). His attempts to be culturally authentic are seen by his family for what they are – a pretentious show
deliberately drawn out to impress for he was a Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist. He basked in statements like: ‘But this is your home’. . . We like you being here .You benefit our country with your traditions (Kureishi, 74). Haroon was aware that he was better accepted as an embodiment of eastern spirituality-despite the pretensions he got an ‘identity’. Another strategy – was an act of being deliberately naive especially in the company of women as it made them rush to protect him an action which was both contrived and exploited.

Haroon inspite of masquerading as a Buddhist, also lays claim to a position of cultural superiority that overthrows or redeems the sense of frustration that burdens immigrants. Maybe it was a strategy that helped Haroon acculturate and Karim differentiate between his own and the others later. It was a very indirect strategy, unwittingly administered but highly effective.

Haroon, a little disenchanted and confused with the ways of the Whites in the end concludes:

I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but Indian (Kureishi 263). But, he is also described as having always “preferred England in every way” and having become “too involved with things here to consider returning”. (Kureishi 213). The halo around the imaginary homeland exists but is in its own place. “Dad had always felt superior to the British; this was the legacy of his Indian childhood – political anger turning into scorn and contempt. For him in India the British were ridiculous, stiff, unconfident, rule-bond. And he’d made me feel that we couldn’t allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people”. (Kureishi, 250).
Anwar and Haroon cribbed about both England and India but left neither. At the same time, the fathers feel they cannot consider themselves fully integrated, though they still do not hint at the emergence of hybridity, and as a result they proudly express their various forms of ‘otherness.’

Anwar runs a small corner store in the suburbs, praises Britain for its democracy and asserts his patriarchal rights by forcing his daughter to marry Changez; he strategises by using a ploy from his homeland – he silently goes on a fast to coerce Jamila to marry. He conforms to his role as the authoritarian patriarch and finally wins. Kureishi reverses his stand by making the old, industrious migrant into the victim, since the presence of Changez contributes to Anwar’s death. He desires to acculturate and works hard for his sustenance and sometimes does get nostalgic about the homeland with Haroon but doesn’t make even a halfhearted attempt to go back. The return to the imaginary homeland is only inward.

As Sunny drifts, his marriage faltering and his past slipping away like loose change, the novel explores how complex, individual identities are really built, through what we choose to remember or imagine. ‘Sunny, like most people, cuts himself off from his past, from the bits he doesn’t like’, says Gunasekera. ‘He forgets as a strategy to live. But he finds that, without an anchor in the past, he’s weightless. His solution, again a strategy is to create a past in London that’s
entirely his own, not that of a group.' *The Match* comes through as a story of lost pasts and vague presents, forced amnesia and missed opportunities and ultimately reconciliation. Cricket is a connector, an authorial strategy though the two matches are fundamentally different from one another – one full of uncertainty, the other a means for decisive action. Sunny’s attempt to connect the fragments of his memories, to join them together, and to find a compromise between the ‘here’ and the ‘there’, the ‘now’ and the ‘then’ is something intrinsic to migrant identities – a survival instinct, both a psychological and physical strategy as the story veers between rootlessness and home-making. Loss with the migrant will exist, it is part of being human and part of growing. *The Match* plots not only a physical, but also an interior geography what Gunesekera calls auto geography. Sunny’s journey away from and back to himself speaks of the migrant’s trajectory of assimilation within himself and self-discovery. The past and the present converge. It is a journey through time that eventually finds him, at the end of the novel, sitting in a stadium with his past, present and future. It is at this moment of merging that he finally realises what he has. The stadium is full of fellow Sri Lankans like him though he knew nobody... “He spoke to no one and no one spoke to him, but there was a sense of solidarity.

. . . He felt he was joining a religion, or something akin to one. (Gunesekera, *The Match*, 260-261). Trying to explain to Clara why he had to see the match he says ‘You don’t understand what it means. It’s a roots thing.’ (Gunesekera, *The Match*, 296)
The Match in the final conclusion is a brilliant strategy proffered by the narrator – a strategy which makes him see his life distinctly frame after frame. His unsettled feeling was finally over. After his momentous photograph: ‘Anything seemed possible: peace, love joy, life everlasting. . .’ (Gunesekera, The Match, 304). Sunny realises that he needed all who were there in the past to make him what he was today, finally he was without regrets – ‘Each in their place for ever, and settling him in his.’ (Gunesekera, The Match, 305) the authorial strategy reveals all – his present position, his roots, his people and the hostland, his wife and son and what they meant to him. It then becomes his strategy as though with the match he has finally acculturated peacefully:

Our side might have collapsed, he thought, but we shared the day. It felt good. He knew what it was like to be in the same place at the same time as his own. Next to him a bunch of teenagers sporting Sri Lankan cricket shirts were chatting excitedly in Tamil. Further on another group were singing in Sinhala. Both supporting the same team. (Gunesekera, The Match, 306)

Finally the divide between the homeland and hostland has been cemented and this strategy helps his understanding. His desire to go to the homeland acts as a major physical strategy for only those who move around can see their dilemmas closely. Back home there was war between the two groups but here far away from the homeland it seemed as if ‘. . . some divisions were close to healing. One suicidal war possibly over. The warmongers tamed. The bloodlust and the hate dissipated. (Gunesekera, The Match, 306)
Post-colonial protagonists seek to create and sustain their own sense of time and space, nation and identity, memory and history. There is the typical postmodern chaos and confusion in the temporal frame in which Prins and Chip relate their story in *The Sandglass* and yet for Prins no predictable sense of self emerges. His end too is the same a typical disjointed postmodern one. Chip has to negotiate a chaotic centre from within as Minoli Salgado explains, 'he privileges a centre that refuses to hold.' Prins explains why he left London for his country:

I scarpered out of here, you know, for a damn good reason. Not just for puttering about. I wanted out of the tangled-up life we had here. The confusion of being nowhere. It made no sense, and I wanted to get a real life. Find something that would make sense of my life. (Gunesekera, *The Sandglass*, 244 – 245)

Many immigrants faced racial discrimination. While the first generation quietly suffered the insults the second generation rarely took things lying down. If the assaults of racism were both physical and mental so were the strategies planned in defence. Karim's father in *Brick Lane* had to resign from his job because of a nervous breakdown. The insults he received daily broke him mentally but strengthened Karim who with a group of followers decided to meet the racists head on.

When I was at school we used to be chased home every day. People getting beaten up the whole time. Then we got together, turned the tables. One of us got touched they all pay for it. (Ali, 279).
Sara Suleri recollects her early years in Chiswick, UK where she went to school with Ifat and had her first experience in racism. When Pip her father asked her why Ifat had so many friends in school and had none, Sara with all the innocence of her age, (she was only seven) replies:

'It's because Ifat's white and I am brown', I suggested brightly. I knew that I had given him, essentialized, a scrupulous rendition of school ground politics, but Papa, the politician was outraged. (Suleri, 160)

Her father was angry and unable to accept this explanation of racial inequality. However he was also under the influence of the racial politics of colonization which he tried to reverse by marrying a British woman.

Karim was also affected from his school days. I reckoned that at least once since I was five years old I had been racially abused 'I was sick too of being affectionately called shitface and curry face (Kureishi, 63). Another example of institutionalised political violence is the way how other children treated Karim in school. Besides being called “Curryface” (Kureishi, 63), which mockingly and insultingly referred to the colour of his skin, he was very often exposed to physical violence as well,

… coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and wood-shavings.’ One kid tried to brand my arm with a red-hot lump of metal. […] Every day I considered myself lucky to get home from school without serious injury” (Kureishi, 63). To be free we had to
free ourselves of all bitterness and resentment too. How was this possible when bitterness and resentment were generated afresh every day? (Kureishi, 227). I wanted to be like everyone else [...] I became incapable of distinguishing between remarks that were genuinely intended to hurt and those intended as ‘humour’.

In forcing Changez to wear a bobble-hat over his face while dancing, Karim tries to erase the sign of a subcontinental heritage that, alongside his Britishness, also constitutes his identity. Many of Jamila’s attitudes were inspired by the possibility that a white group might kill one of us one day.” (Kureishi, 56). But this did not make either him or Jamila accept the racial slurs. When Changez was violently attacked they decided to ‘march and make our voices heard’ (Kureishi, 225). Karim was told, ‘You’re dark-skinned, you’re small and wiry, and you’ll be sweet but wholesome in the costume.’ (Kureishi, 143) he was revulsed but kept quiet because of the job.

When confronted with racism, which Kureishi describes as unreasonable and prejudiced, with ignorance and a failure of sense, Karim decides to overcome the prejudice in the (United) “Kingdom of Prejudice” (Kureishi, 254) and starts his fight by coming to terms with who he really is. Only then is he capable of finding his place in the multicultural and multiracial hybrid society of modern London. Racial abuses and ethnic discrimination was a shock to him for he always thought despite his brown skin he had integrated into the centre and no longer stood marginalised in the fringe. He despised his director Shadwell who bluntly
tells him that ‘... he is only a half caste in England – belonging nowhere, wanted no-where.’ (Kureishi, 141).

The position of the immigrant today is self-explained from the above mentioned statement. The immigrant in order to acculturate follows a process of strategization, where in some cases he becomes one with the dominant culture, in others he leaves the hostland or takes the middle path acculturating, but not assimilating. This process of acculturation brings about changes in cultural, personal and social identity.

Diaspora writing transgresses all cartographical boundaries with each individual inhabiting an ‘in-between’ or liminal space. The co-existence of different cultures in the British Society replaces the supremacy of a dominant culture and also encourages new beginnings. The circumstantial ‘no-place-ness,’ caused by dispossession, dislocation or displacement has turned out to be the ‘site of new beginnings’ as suggested by Avtar Brah. Young adults are faced with the challenge of creating a cultural identity that incorporates elements of the heritage and the receiving cultures, customs, habits, myths, religion and moral attitudes.

Nazneen’s motherhood takes over precedence and in spite of her desires she rationalizes that she wants her children to be happy which they can never be in Bangladesh. Dual feelings of rebellion and acceptance surge through her. Maybe her economic empowerment ironically initiated by Chanu brings about her ‘self’
realization. She stays back with her children and evolves as a designer. Her transition is complete as with a heightened sense of self-esteem she feels she can control fate. ‘She would make it right for the girls ’(Ali, 178). Independent Nazneen realises the truth of what Razia says, ‘This is England. You can do whatever you like.’ Sunny feels complete, satisfied as he finally balances his worlds. Despite all his strategies to assimilate, Karim has not really progressed, either in his political thinking or in his dealing with the anxieties regarding the ambivalence of his cultural location till almost the end. He understands the value of his background, the importance of connecting with his own at the very end. Allie strategises by choosing the easier way out – complete assimilation. Haroon realizes that even if he misses his wife and his family he has to marry Eva, complete the karmic cycle he has plotted for himself.

Those characters who succeed are the socially-psychologically accultured ones who have even mastered being bi cultural, they are less encumbered by what David Gunning calls, ‘inherited conceptions’. Female migrants are more open to hybridization and acculturation – Nazneen, Razia, Jorina, Sara, Pearl, Naomi, Jamila whereas Chanu goes back to Bangladesh, Anwar dies remembering Bombay, Prins disappears, Ravi commits suicide and Razia’s husband also dies in an accident. The immigrants from Bangladesh synthesise by bringing their culture back to England – re-synthesising the lifestyle within Britain by creating a mythical homeland in the hostland, and expect their children to abide by the traditions and mores of this imaginary world. Social networks like neighbours,
friends at the workplace were vital in supporting the women about the constraints they experience at home and alienation and racism in the community. The second generation feel the pull of ethnicity in the new country, yet understand they cannot return back and so adapt without any tearful sentimentality.

To create acculturation strategies and survive in Britain does not necessarily require a denunciation of one’s identity or an assimilation to the cultural and sub-cultural characteristics associated with ‘white’ British identity. There is cultural dislocation, intercultural uneasiness, psychological fragmentation and complexity of postmodern identity. The immigrants instead of merging into the dominant culture strive to keep their language, traditions and culture to express their sense of ‘otherness’. It is as Gilroy suggested “…not a return to roots, but a coming-to-terms-with our routes.”

30
Endnotes


4. Mediascape refers both to the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) these images of the world involve many complicated inflections depending on their mode, their audiences and the hardware. These mediascapes provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are mixed. Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy.” In Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Eds.) *Theorising Diaspora : A Reader*, USA : Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2003. p.33


17. Ibid. p.4


23. Ruvani, Ranasinha *South Asian Writers in Twentieth Century Britain : Cultural Translation*, USA : Oxford University Press, 2007, p.64


